Who Built America?

THIRD EDITION

Volume Two
Since 1877

American Social History Project
The City University of New York

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Working People and the Nation's History

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For Roy Rosenzweig (1950–2007), trusted friend and collaborator, world-class historian, and coauthor and coeditor, who was with us every step of the way for the past twenty-five years and who helped us understand that to recover a meaningful past, we needed to give voice to ordinary people, embrace innovation in all its forms, and possess, as he always did, a great sense of humor.

Preface

Who built the seven towers of Thebes?
The books are filled with the names of kings.
Was it kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone? . . .
In the evening when the Chinese wall was finished,
Where did the masons go? . . .

—Bertolt Brecht, "Questions from a Worker Who Reads" (1935)

WHO BUILT AMERICA? surveys the nation's past from an important but often neglected perspective: the transformations wrought by the changing nature and forms of work and the role that working people played in the making of modern America. In an age when globalizing economies, profound technological changes, and ever more remote exercises of power are altering the nature of life and labor, *Who Built America?*'s distinctive interpretation of the nation's past is more necessary than ever. Not merely a documentation of the country's presidents, politics, and wars, *Who Built America?* focuses on the fundamental social and economic conflicts that have shaped U.S. history and challenges the notion that the vast majority of America's citizens have always been united in a broad consensus about the nation's basic values and shared in its extraordinary prosperity. This emphasis puts the history of the workplace, community, family, gender roles, race, and ethnicity at the center of the more familiar textbook narrative of politics and economic development; in doing so, it renders more intelligible the beliefs and actions of the nation's economic, political, and intellectual elites. By taking up the central questions of how the nation's work has changed and how workers have changed the nation, *Who Built America?* offers an indispensable guide to the historical developments that have brought us to the present day.

Approach

We have defined the category of "working people" broadly. Throughout much of its history, the nation's actual workforce embraced a wide spectrum of people laboring in very different conditions and settings. Answering the question "Who built America?" therefore requires attention not only

to wage-earning industrial employees but also to indentured servants, slaves, tenant farmers, sharecroppers, independent farm families, artisans, small proprietors, day laborers, clerks, domestic workers, outworkers, service and technical workers, and women and children performing unpaid family labor—in short, the great majority of the American population at every phase of the country's development.

This book grew out of the now four-decades-old effort to reinterpret American history from the bottom up—drawing on studies of workers, women, consumers, farmers, African Americans, and immigrants—that has helped transform our understanding of the past. The American Social History Project (ASHP) was founded in 1981 at the City University of New York by Herbert Gutman (a pioneer of what was then the "new social history") and Stephen Brier to bring this history to the broadest possible audience. In addition to this book, ASHP has produced over the past quarter-century a wide range of accessible educational materials in print, video, and digital media and worked closely with college, high school, and adult and labor education teachers to help them use these resources effectively in their classrooms.

Who Built America?, now in its third edition, retains its distinctive interpretation and strong point of view. We continue to tackle controversial issues and offer opinions that are sometimes critical of celebrated figures or dominant beliefs. Our view is that readers would rather encounter a clearly stated perspective, even if they disagree with it, than bland platitudes about the past.

Organization and Coverage

This volume of *Who Built America?* is divided into three parts. Its principal theme is the increasing significance of global industrial capitalism and wage labor for the nation's economy, social relations, domestic politics, foreign policy, and intellectual life since 1877 and the corresponding growth and transformation of the American working class. A prologue sets the stage for this story by recapitulating the story of Reconstruction and the 1877 railroad strikes, which are also covered in the first volume. Each part is preceded by a brief essay that lays out the events, changes, and ideas covered in the chapters to come. These essays help students to think synthetically and thematically about the material.

- Part One considers the years between the great railroad strikes of 1877 and the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914, exploring industrial capitalism's Gilded Age growth and the resulting rise of mass movements of protest, including the labor movement, Populism, and socialism. It also covers U.S. overseas expansion, the increasing

racism and segregationist legislation that rolled back gains achieved by African Americans in the Reconstruction era, the massive wave of immigration from eastern and southern Europe that transformed the nation's cities after 1900, the dramatic changes in popular culture and everyday life in the early twentieth century, and the progressive movement that emerged in response to the nation's growing political and economic crisis.

- Part Two surveys the two world wars and the turbulent decades between them. It examines the unparalleled growth and power of U.S. political and economic institutions, and the continued recomposition of the American working class through a vast internal migration of Americans, white and black, from the rural South. Tracing the dramatic impact of the Great Depression, this part details working people's unprecedented mobilization, that gave birth to the industrial union movement and an expansive sense of citizenship and empowerment for millions of working Americans. This new political engagement helped sustain the partial welfare state created by Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and America's entry into and ultimate victory in World War II.
- Part Three examines life in post–World War II America, as U.S. military and economic ascendancy and tensions with the Soviet Union defined the Cold War era. It explores the triumph, decline, and continued struggles of the labor movement and the changing working-class experience as new waves of immigrants arrived after 1965. Highlighting the birth of the civil rights movement that transformed America's political culture and moral values and gave rise to a host of new social movements, Part Three covers U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the subsequent rise of the New Right, and the continued conflicts over gender and race. Moving into the twenty-first century, this part's final chapters consider economic globalization, America's war on terror, and the increasing divide between the nation's wealthy and the poor and middle classes.

New to This Edition and Distinctive Features

The most visible change in the third edition is a reorganized chapter structure that makes *Who Built America?* work better as a textbook. Each chapter now has several main sections with subsections, enabling students to navigate the chapters more efficiently. New outlines at the beginning of each chapter show coverage at a glance. All section headings have been revised for clarity, all chapter and section introductions have been strengthened to help students focus on key ideas, and each chapter ends with a conclusion that

reinforces the main points and eases the transition to the next chapter. Detailed timelines (Years in Review) are provided at the end of each chapter to ensure that key events are not lost in the narrative flow and to facilitate review. For instructors and students seeking to explore topics in greater depth, there is also at the end of each chapter a list of Additional Readings that encompass the topics covered in that chapter.

Just as important, for this edition we have taken into account the vast outpouring of recent scholarship to explore more deeply the histories of Spanish-speaking peoples, women, popular culture, new technologies, and developments in the American Southwest and Far West. At the same time, we have linked these histories both to changing class and racial dynamics in the broader society and to the decisions made by economic and political elites. We have also expanded discussions of the global context which defined American labor and politics. Where new historical evidence has come to light, we have modified our interpretation. Volume Two ends with an entirely new chapter—"America's World After 9/11"—that examines the social history and impact of September 11, 2001; the realities exposed and questions raised by the catastrophic effects of Hurricane Katrina; the effects of globalization on America's working people; and the continuing war in Iraq.

In response to user feedback, this edition of *Who Built America?* also contains more "Voices" in each chapter—excerpts from letters, diaries, autobiographies, poems, songs, journalism, fiction, official testimony, oral histories, and other historical documents. These primary sources convey the experiences and beliefs of working people who lived through the events recounted in the text and offer instructors additional opportunities for assignments and discussions. In the interest of clarity, we have modernized some of the spelling, punctuation, and usage in these records.

Visual Program

The drawings, paintings, prints, cartoons, photographs, objects, and other visual media that we have selected to illustrate *Who Built America?* supplement the book's themes and narrative, showing the people, places, and events discussed in the text. In this new edition, we have included examples of material culture—from implements used in the workshop or office to furniture used in the home—to show how everyday objects embodied significant changes in social life. But in keeping with our approach in the first two editions of the book, our illustrations also address subjects not included in the narrative; they offer perspectives on the past that were often not articulated in the written record or were conveyed in a wholly different way from "the word" via visual media. Throughout U.S. history, ideas, experiences, events, and conditions were recorded and expressed in evocative and

provocative images and objects that Americans treated with as much seriousness and enjoyment as they did text. Sometimes tainted by racism or chauvinism and marked by invidious caricatures, Americans challenged these images as part of their larger longstanding struggles to achieve equality. In short, images mattered, and the illustrations and captions in each chapter of *Who Built America?* offer readers a parallel narrative that, in juxtaposition to the text, demonstrates how different visual media interpreted and thus helped shape beliefs about the people, events, and ideas of the time.

Supplements

NEW Computerized Test Bank for *Who Built America?* Written by Steven H. Jaffe, Ph.D. (Volume 1), and John Spencer of Ursinus College (Volume 2), the new Test Bank for *Who Built America?* offers multiple-choice, short answer, and essay questions for each chapter, providing opportunities for ongoing assessments and cumulative exams.

NEW Instructor's Resource CD-ROM. Includes PowerPoint presentations built around chapter outlines, maps, figures, and selected images from the textbook, plus JPEG versions of all maps and figures and selected images.

NEW Book Companion Site at bedfordstmartins.com/whobuiltamerica The companion Web site gathers all the electronic resources for *Who Built America?* at a single Web address, providing convenient links to assignment and research materials such as the libraries at Make History and the resources provided by the American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning.

Acknowledgments

Despite the major changes implemented by the authors and editors of this edition, the narrative of *Who Built America?* rests heavily on the labors of the authors of the previous two editions: David Bensman, Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, Joshua Brown, David Brundage, Bret Eynon, Joshua Freeman, Bruce Levine, Nelson Lichtenstein, Bryan Palmer, and Susan Strasser. We want to note with regret the passing of Susan Porter Benson, who was one of the original authors and contributors to the American Social History Project. In addition, we want to thank the many people who helped to bring forth this edition, especially our colleagues at Bedford/St. Martin's: Joan Feinberg, Mary Dougherty, Jane Knetzger, William

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Finally, we would be remiss if we ended our acknowledgments without noting the role of the late Herbert Gutman (1929–1985) in creating the American Social History Project, which gave birth to this book, and in shaping the generation of historical scholarship on which it is based. Our collective and individual debts to Herb are immeasurable. We hope that this new edition of *Who Built America?* meets the high standards he set for himself throughout his rich but too brief career.

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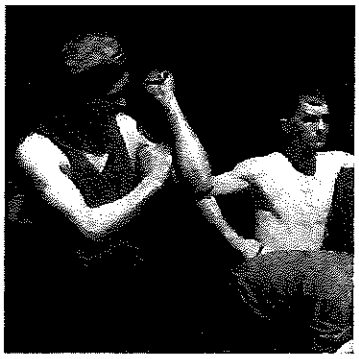

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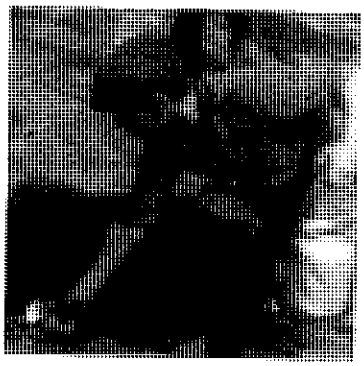

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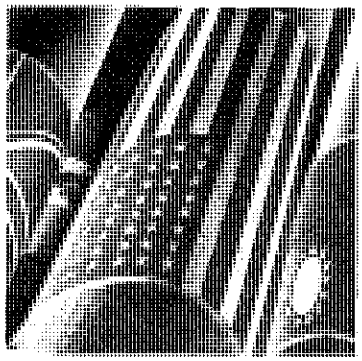

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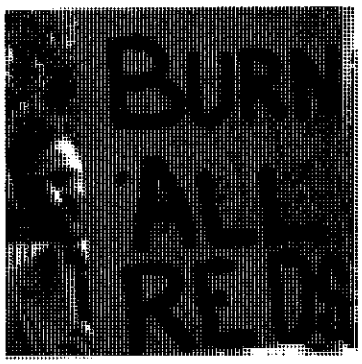

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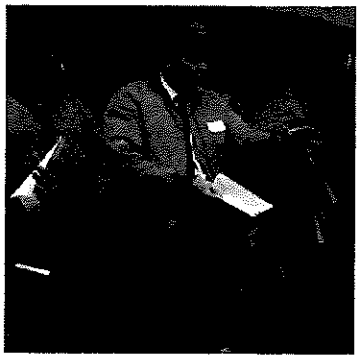

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